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THE RELATION BETWEEN THE IDEAL AND THE PRACTICAL IN THE KINDERGARTEN PROGRAMME

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Every individual is living out, each moment, his own view of the relation between the ideal and the practical, between ultimate purpose and immediate necessity. Unrest comes from the constant changing of relationship necessary to growth. A quiescent state in individuals, in groups, in institutions, would show deterioration, for the elevation of the ideal with the consequent adjustment of the practical is the activity which indicates the expanding of life.

The relation between the ideal and the practical in the kindergarten programme is therefore not a static condition; yet if it is a valid relationship, it must be based upon the same principle as that relation in the world at large. In this paper it will be assumed that the relationship is one of unity, not identity, that both are aspects necessary for reality, the ideal being the power, and the practical the means, by which the potential becomes actual.

Every act which rises above the threshold of an impulsive or an instinctive action, is by its very nature ideal-practical. It implies in varying degrees that there is a purpose, that the immediate action is not left on the plane of the present, but is lifted somewhat toward the possibility of the future. Except with the pessimist, it implies the attitude which learns from the past, and which interprets by faith, believing that the future will excel the past by the help of the present.

In attempting to define the position held toward the relationship between the ideal and practical in the kindergarten programme, it will be well to seek in the past for that which will aid in leading toward the goal mapped out by far-sighted inter-

preters. To Froebel we will turn, as it was not possible to have a kindergarten (to educate consciously a child of five years) until he had brought to consciousness certain educative principles. Froebel is also one of the philosophers who will point out the goal.

Froebel saw all living and consequently all education as a process of interaction. His observations led him to discern that it was carried on from the beginning of the new life to the last days. His educational aim was to bring to consciousness in the individual, the idea that strength of personality was dependent upon the degree to which interaction was carried on. It was for the purpose of encouraging a child to develop this principle in his daily living, and also to see it in perspective as fully as his few years made possible, that the kindergarten was established. This was the step in the revelation of the principle which the five-year-old child was to take.

It was Froebel who saw that interaction occurred in three different directions in the universe: between an individual and (1) a higher level, God; (2) the same level, man, and (3) a lower level, nature. It is the differing attitudes of human beings which make it possible to appreciate these different levels. There are all gradations of attitudes and so there are feelings of many different levels, but these three are different enough in degree to be designated as distinct types. The attitude toward (1) a higher level is that of worship, toward (2) the same, comradeship, toward (3) a lower, control. The first attitude involves a feeling of an ideal to be copied, an end to be attained; the third, a feeling of material to be impressed, a means to be used to gain some end; the second attitude involves a feeling of the possibility of both copying and impressing, of using as means or as end.

The kindergarten, as Froebel suggested it to us, was to show the principle of interaction working in the form in which it was found in the universe, in its three different directions. The teacher was to stand for (1) the higher level; she was to call forth the feelings of love, faith and obedience. The playmates were to stand for (2) the world of humanity, and the spirit of co-operation was to be cultivated; opportunities were to be given for each one to lead and to be led. (3) Materials were to be

used for carrying out and enlarging the child's expressions of his purposes, and in order that this functional use might be accomplished in the best way, the possibilities of the materials were to be considered. These are the three factors in the kindergarten programme (teacher, playmates, materials¹), which are to be so used that a child will be able to comprehend better the working of interaction in his later life.

The kindergartner is the one to whom a child should look for guidance. She is the sympathetic leader who stands to the child, relatively, as the philosophers do to the adult. It is she who will develop his behavior toward a standard; it is she who will give the cue as to his association with other children; and it is she who will suggest his attitude toward materials. It is the kindergartner who determines what a child shall gain from the other factors. She stands to the child as an embodiment of an ideal and also provides means by which he can strive toward it. The most important connecting link then, between the ideal and the practical in the kindergarten programme, is the kindergartner.

The next point is the consideration of the motive which will determine a teacher's influence in the kindergarten. If every individual is living out, each moment, his own view of the relation between the world's purpose and immediate necessity, he will give back to the world what he feels the world has given him, he will give back the meaning which the world has for him. Professor James says, your philosophy "is your individual way of just seeing and feeling the push and pressure of the cosmos."² The philosophy of the kindergartner governs the programme. It will indicate the goal toward which to strive and also point out the path by which this can be reached. Let us consider the attitude of the kindergartner toward a few of the philosophical problems which will most strongly affect the programme.

The attitude which the kindergartner will try to create toward herself will depend upon her own feeling toward the spirit in the

¹ The word "materials," as here employed, covers everything that a child uses as a means in gaining control of his experience. Conversation, song, and story are materials for the tongue, rhythm and games for the body, handwork of various kinds for the hand.

² William James, *Pragmatism*, p. 4.

universe. She could hold one of three differing views (1) that spirit is transcendent only, (2) that it is immanent only, or (3) that it both enfolds and is in matter. If (1) God is transcendent only, the kindergartner will rule her little world with absolute authority, requiring blind obedience, probably controlling with kindness, but considering no appeal possible. With this attitude there is a tendency to ignore the child's impulses and instincts, using artificial means to make growth. If (2) spirit is immanent solely, there will be no attempt to set a standard. The decision of the children will be as important as that of the teacher. Her idea will be, that a child will force his best growth if allowed to follow his own wish. If (3) the same spirit is in and around all, impulses and instincts will be utilized to make toward the highest ideals known. The children will be helped to work for self-control by exercising their own power of making decisions, but these will be aided by the suggestion and example of the adult. This adult will reserve to herself the final authority, where permanent injury, either physical or moral, might result.

Kindergartners may have differing views concerning the relation of the past to the present. This will affect the development of the social spirit among the children. If (1) the values recognized by the best men of today are the only ones of worth, children must be made to conform to those standards. If (2) the ideals of the past are as important as those of the present, children may be allowed to form their own ideals as a group without advice or aid. But if (3) the values found by the race in its gradual development have had their share in forming the models of the present, which represent the highest aspirations of the race, the kindergartner will recognize the place which childish standards should have in the growth of the group; but by example and suggestion she will seek to elevate the ideal to what more nearly approximates the best of today. There will be the gradual evolution of a society growing in a way similar to man's, founded upon the desire for activity and the gregarious instinct. First, (a) the children will all do the same thing at the same time; (b) a little later the result of the activity will be put together to form a common product. Then (c) will come the choice of

a leader with all the children following. Next (*d*) will come the planning of a purpose by contributions from many individuals; this purpose will then be carried out by each child in his own way. Finally (*e*) will come the planning of a common purpose which can be accomplished only by each child perfecting the particular share which falls to his lot. The kindergartner will use these methods with all materials, progressing as far as she can with each as she will realize that between four and six years of age is the period for the most rapid development of social ideals.

The attitude cultivated toward materials will depend largely upon what the kindergartner considers most real in life. (1) The extremists, such as the early Christians, held that reality was spirit only, appearance was to be despised. (2) Others, as the later Greeks, believed that reality was only in what stimulated the senses. (3) Some philosophers of the present maintain that reality is the complete union of the spiritual and the material, the latter being the form in which spirit, in order to exist in this world, must embody itself. If (1) spirit is the solely important, that time is wasted which is spent dealing with the concrete; conversations, stories and songs which treat of virtues and other abstractions will be the only valuable parts of the programme. There will be a constant play of moods, but the essence of each will be lost because not embodied in form. If (2) on the other hand, the material side is solely valuable, materials will be used as ends in themselves; acquisition of facts, perfection of form and ability to practice technique will be the aim. Each thing, even the kindergarten itself as a whole, will be so complete that it will show a finish very pleasing to the adult. If (3) reality is the unity of the spiritual and the material, the kindergartner will lead a child to feel that there should be a guiding thought which seeks expression through all the materials at his command, through conversation, story, song, rhythm, game and handwork. Balance will always be preserved; the creative spirit will be called forth and take form in something adequate to the significance of the moment. A child will gain a feeling of the self as an organic unity; thought and expression in perfect accord will intensify the personality.

The kindergartner's yearly and even daily plans will be influenced by her view concerning the teleology of the universe. She may think that (1) God's design is static and unchangeable, in which case, she can have a fixed programme which will be of use everywhere. She may believe that (2) there is no preconceived plan, that the purpose is gradually evolving as the universe develops, then she will use any momentary suggestion of the children as a basis for work. But if (3) God's purpose is a living, growing one which man is helping to embody, the kindergartner will have a definite plan in mind, but it will be a principle rather than a design, so flexible that it will allow for variations which would be more valuable for the children at the particular time and place than the detail she had prepared.

In the kindergartner's attitude toward good and evil will be found the key to her discipline. If (1) because the body contains a soul, every human being is naturally good, mature ideals will be held up for copy in the belief that this is all that is necessary to bring a child back to rectitude. If, on the other hand, (2) being in a fleshy body means a natural inclination to sin, the evil must be driven out at all costs even by negative, compulsory methods. There may be another view (3) that "goodness" is a relative term, according to the standards of society, which are constantly changing. If evil is untrained impulse, the teacher will generally notice an offending action by suggesting a more virtuous way to free the energy.

Lastly, the view which the kindergartner holds of the nature of unity will be at the basis of her attitude toward the principle of interaction and will determine her choice of topics and method of treatment. If (1) she leans to the ideal side, the adult will give much and the child little. Any subject which the adult feels of value will be presented, trusting that the child will gain something from its consideration. If (2) emphasis is placed on the practical side, the respective shares will be reversed. Whatever interests the child will be taken up in the same way that a child uses it, for its momentary significance only. If (3) unity means the combining of two equal though unlike elements, both adult and child must have equivalent parts in carrying out the

principle of interaction. It will fall to the child's lot to select the points of interest for discussion (these for a five-year-old child will be in his immediate surroundings), and to the adult to find wherein they can be stamped with the values which will lead toward the acceptance of race judgments.

In summing up, if it were possible to mention all the methods included under numeral one (1) under each point, they would be seen to carry out a very consistent philosophy. A totally opposing view, and yet consistent in itself, would be found under (2); and the middle view under (3). Very few people are extremists, yet there is a tendency to lean more to one side than the other. Along the middle line lies truth. Emphasis on either the ideal or the practical in the kindergarten programme makes it one-sided. The true relation is the union of the two and the degree to which this relationship is maintained depends upon one factor. That factor is a personality.

The usual programme states the topic chosen, the idea which the children are to gain from its consideration, and also the particular method and purpose of each part of the day. The real programme can never be written, for the personal touch of the kindergartner arouses the controlling ideas, and is the most powerful method.